

During a period of five weeks, I have seen how instruction can make a difference to a student. Through research and hard work, I took this concept one step farther. What difference does instruction make? With qualitative and quantitative data, and the help of twenty-two students, I will show how close instruction can make a difference in even spelling.

## **Preparation**

As we have learned in many classes, you must adapt your curriculum to your students. Whether you have advanced or below level students, teachers must be willing to adjust the lessons to suit each student. I had a very unique class, consisting of twenty-two students, fourteen boys, and eight girls, one emotionally disabled and two ESL students. Adjusting the curriculum was an understatement for this class.

The majority of the students had a list of twelve words using the long *a* and *i* concept, for example, *take, gave, time, life*, etc. Seven of the students had adjusted lists where they would pick more challenging words that had concepts they were learning in class, for example, if the students were learning about space, a challenging word might be Saturn or revolution. The students would pick their own words, some only choosing one and others up to five.

Two other students also had adjusted lists that were a little less challenging and more suitable for their learning levels. One of the students was ESL and had words like, *Tim, pit, and lip*. The other student had similar words to the original spelling list, like, *shake and make*.

To prepare for the students I looked at each spelling list. Activities were planned for Monday thru Friday of the next week. On Monday we were going to have a sort of pre-test. Tuesday thru Thursday would be reinforcement days, where I conduct fun activities for the students to do to get familiar with the words. Friday was the actual test day.

I discovered a great website called [discoveryschool.com](http://discoveryschool.com), where teachers could make puzzles. Three puzzle types were made and adjusted to each student's spelling list. These would be the activities used Tuesday thru Thursday.

## **Day one**

Day one of the research project began with a pre-test. The students were told why we were having the pre-test, i.e., I would be using it for school, to see how teacher's can help students learn. I explained to the students that the test would not be graded and to try their best. After the pre-test, instruction was given. Students separated the words into groups, one with long *a*, one with long *i*.

Each week the students also have homophones on each list. This week they were *break* and *brake*. We discussed the differences and wrote them down. I wanted the students to write down their words to get familiar with printing them. Sometimes writing them several times helps the students become more familiar with them. Lastly, the students wrote their spelling sentence. Capitalization and punctuation were reinforced during instruction. Students are marked off on their final test, for misuse of them in their sentences.

*Please see attached data for results.*

## **Day two**

On day two, I presented the students with a crossword puzzle. Each student had a puzzle adjusted to their list, even the students with extra words. One of the adjusted lists was difficult to do, because the words were so similar to each other. The puzzle maker could only make the words fit in so many ways. I used Microsoft Word to create a puzzle to suit the list. Instead of one big puzzle, it consisted of several little puzzles.

Once the puzzles were passed out, I explained how to do the crossword puzzle and asked if they had ever done one before. A lot of the students said they had. From the results of the lesson, I could tell they might have had assistance with the puzzles. The lesson went fairly well. The students needed very close instruction. They did not seem to have trouble figuring out the sentences or spelling words, but the format of the puzzle. It was difficult for them to see how to fit the words into the puzzle. Overall, the students liked to do the puzzle and were excited to do something different. I was pleased to see they enjoyed it and that they were reinforcing their knowledge of the words.

### **Day three**

On day three the students were presented with word searches. Once again, this was something most of the students had done before. The directions were explained to everyone to make sure they knew exactly what to do. Once they had found all their words, they could find out what the hidden sentence was. The students were told to find their words first and then once they were complete, to raise their hand for further instructions. I did not want them to get too far ahead of themselves. From previous experience with the class, if given too many instructions they become confused and sometimes mix the instructions. I decided it would be best to let them take their time.

The students did very well on the word search. The lesson seemed more familiar to them than the crossword puzzle from day one. They knew the format, but looked for help when they could not find a word. I told the students to form a square around the letter they were looking for to see if the next letter in the word followed the first letter. This seemed to help many. I observed many students underlining letters, for example, if a student was looking for *nice*, they would underline all the *N*s. If I were to do the word search again I might not include all the spelling words or have a smaller format. The students became very dependent on help. They seemed to be looking for the answer. I seemed to be a sort of laziness or lack of interest after a while. That is why I might shorten the word search in the future. So the activity could be more independent.

Once the students reached the sentence, many knew just what it was once they had a few words. They had become familiar with the sentence from the “drilling” of the two previous days. I told the students to not write what they think it is, but to figure it out the correct way. Once they had found the hidden sentence, many of the students giggled about the fact that they knew what it was going to be. I explained to them my excitement that they knew the sentence. This way they would know the sentence well when they would take their test on Friday.

### **Day four**

For day four, I prepared a spelling scramble for the students. There are a series of boxes with scrambled spelling words beside the boxes. The students had to unscramble the words and fit them into the boxes. Once they unscrambled all the words, the students

would have a hidden message to figure out. Under some on the boxes were numbers. To find the hidden message the students had to match the numbers with the sentence below. Then they would transfer the letter that was in the box to the corresponding box in the sentence. For example, if one of the unscrambled words was *take*, a number might be placed under the *t*. The *t* would then be transferred to the sentence wherever the same number appears.

Once the students go the hang of the idea, the lesson went fairly quick. If I were to do the same activity again, I might show the students more examples to get them off to a better start. As before, the students knew the sentence very well. Most of the students did not need to solve it, but once again I asked to go through the process instead of guessing. As stated before, I was pleased the students were so familiar with the sentence so they could reflect that on the test.

### **Day five**

The big test day. I think was more nervous or just excited to see how well the students would do than they were. Before the test, we reviewed the words and their patterns during calendar. I would ask the students how to spell certain words. Students would raise their hands and spell for the group. Once we would decide how to spell the word, we would then decide what pattern or category it would fit in; the long *i* or long *a* sound.

During the review, we did not go over extra spelling words. Students who had advanced words worked on them during the puzzles and in their own time. My main focus was on words that all students would have. My ESL student worked with a specialist everyday on her words and took the final test with her.

Finally, we took the test. The students seemed confident and quick to write their words. I observed many students writing the sentence while waiting to spell the next word. I would have to redirect the students to focus on the sentence when the time came. Once I read the sentence, I told the students to remember how to write a correct sentence. I did not tell them to use capitalization and punctuation, because I did not want to give them too much information. According to my cooperating teacher, they had been working on those areas for some time.

## Results

From the results of the tests, the students did great. Once I analyzed the data, I seen that the test scores may not have be the best for all the students, but most of them improved, some more significantly than others. The lowest score in the class was a 78 percent, which was an emotionally disabled student, who was not always in the class to do our extra spelling activities. Like my ESL student, a specialist teacher in another class gave him his test. Compared to his other scores, it was his highest yet. The total classroom average was a 94 percent out of 21 students. Below is a break down of the test scores.

Pre-Test Scores	Recent Test Scores	Average of previous scores	Total number missed	# incorrect (only including words went over in class, not sentence structure or challenging words)	How many missed due to misspelled or mix up of homophones	X if highest score to date
78%	88%	90%	3	0	0	
65%	96%	90%	1	0	0	
96%	89%	92%	3	1	1	
91%	96%	86%	1	0	0	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest
87%	96%	93%	1	1	1	
-	87%	80%	3	0	2	
65%	100%	86%	0	0	0	Had 100% before
57%	87%	75%	3	2	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest
-	96%	87%	1	0	0	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest
96%	100%	77%	0	0	0	X
-	100%	82%	0	0	0	Had 100% once before
91%	100%	97%	0	0	0	
52%	91%	71%	2	0	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest
61%	91%	48%	2	1	1	X- closest to score is 67%
91%	100%	97%	0	0	0	
87%	91%	75%	2	1	1	2 <sup>nd</sup> highest
39%	100%	70%	0	0	0	Had 100% once before
83%	100%	83%	0	0	0	
26%	91%	35% adjusted list (easier)	2	0	n/a	X-closest to score is 76%
43%	78%	36%	5	4	2	X
-	93%	77% adjusted list (easier)	1	1	n/a	

Yellow/**Green** =personal high score

**Green** =most improved of whole class

According to the data, there was a 100 percent passing rate. Out of the 21 students, 7 received a perfect score. As I stated before, many of the students did not receive their best score on the test given, but most of the students improved. Compared to previous test scores the students definitely benefited from teacher instruction. The students not only improved in their previous test scores, but also improved from their pre-tests given before instruction. As you can see there was a 100 percent improvement rate from the pre-tests to the final test.

As shown in the table above, many of the mistakes made by the students were not in the words discussed in class. Many of them were in mixing up the homophones, which in most cases the students would spell them right, but put them in the incorrect order. For example, the first homophone read to the students in class was *brake*, as in a car has brakes. The second homophone was *break*, as in it is time to take a break. Many of the students spelled them right, but had the wrong meaning. Of course the students had to be held accountable on the test, because that is the main purpose of learning homophones.

Another popular mistake on the test was in the sentences. The students would either not use punctuation or capitalization where it was needed. For each mistake the students had, there was one point taken off. If the students misspelled a spelling word or any other word in the sentence they also missed a point. Out of 30 mistakes 11 of them were due to sentence mistakes. Out of the same 30 mistakes, 12 of them were due to mixing up or misspelling the homophones.

A third popular mistake was done on challenging lists. Six students who had adjusted listed did work on the words in their activities throughout the week, but we did not talk about the words as a whole. I did not address or teach the students about the words they chose. It was their job to study the extra words. Of the total 30 mistakes discussed above, 4 of them were on these challenging words. Out of the six students who had challenging words, two of them would have gotten a perfect score if it were not for these words.

I wish the students all could have gotten a perfect score, but I do feel that this reinforces the idea that instruction does benefit the students. As I stated before, most of the mistakes were not made in the actual spelling of the words discussed. Only 37 percent

of the mistakes made on the tests were due to misspelling of the words we discussed. This makes me wonder if we had gone over challenging words or punctuation, if the students would have gotten better scores. The results above prove how much of a difference instruction makes. If Mrs.Geist would decide to continue to reinforce the spelling in her class, I would guess the students would only improve in their future test scores.

## **Student Reflection**

After the test results were calculated, the students were asked to reflect on the week. I discussed with the students how well they did on the tests and how glad I was they had done so well. I wanted to know what they felt worked best for them. I asked the students to tell me what helped them that we had done in class and might like to do again. Here are some of the student's responses:

Tyler: Tyler liked the word sorts, because he seen the words a lot and got used to them. He also kept doing them at home.

Chelsie: Chelsie felt the review on the day of the test helped her best

Alexis/Andy: Both liked the word search and when we had mixed letters and had to unscramble them to spell them right.

Jordan: Jordan liked the crossword best. It helped him understand the difference between *break* and *brake*.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of qualitative and quantitative data, instruction does make a difference, especially in this case. The students had a 100 percent passage rate and had an almost perfect score on the things that were reinforced and discussed in class. The students improved significantly, which is more than I could ask for.

From my experience, I feel like a true teacher. I adjusted my curriculum to suit all of my students. Lesson plans were then made to help us work on reaching our goal everyday of the week with fun activities that the students enjoyed doing. Once the test came along, I was more than happy to see that all of the students passed the test with flying colors. Teaching is a process. Students can not learn everything they need to

succeed in life, in one day. Progress is what truly shows a student's true colors. To see that the students worked hard and enjoyed it along the way is a great reward. Instruction was a true test that proved successful.